

1998

# Bosnia: The Interface of Hope and History and the Conundrum of Post-War International Intervention

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*Master's Capstone Projects*. 137.  
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**Bosnia: The Interface of Hope and History and the Conundrum of Post-war  
International Intervention**

A Master's Project Presented

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Education**

August, 1998

Center for International Education

**Abstract**

In 1997 I worked with the OSCE in Bosnia organizing the first post-war municipal elections. During this time I was confronted with the massive efforts of the international community in Bosnia, the limited development of the peace process two years after the war and the need for a clearer sense of history in order to understand the best direction for international community in their ongoing intervention in Bosnia. Coming so close on the heels of this genocidal war, an established historical perspective on the war is still very much in the making. Using a spate of conversations I had with Bosnians regarding the war combined with recent readings on the war, I attempt a general overview of the war with an aim to orientating future international involvement. I begin with a brief overview of the ancient and recent history that lead up to the war. The paper then explores some of the problems inherent to the Dayton agreement. I explain my work on elections and explain how this relates to implementation of the Dayton peace agreement. In conclusion I develop some specific ideas about how international assistance could be more effective in promoting the peace process.

## **Bosnia: The Interface of Hope and History and Conundrum of Post-war International Intervention**

“The nights were filled with prudent and passionate whisperings in which pulsed invisible waves of the most daring dreams and wishes, the most improbable thoughts and plans which triumphed and broke in the blue darkness overhead. Next day at dawn, Turks and Serbs went out to work and met one another with the dull and expressionless faces, greeted one another and talked together with those hundred or so commonplace words of provincial courtesy which had from times past circulated in the town and passed from one to another like counterfeit coin which none the less makes communication possible and easy.” (p. 83)

“But the next day everything was as it had always been, for townsmen did not like to remember evil and did not worry about the future; in their blood was the conviction that real life consists of calm periods and that it would be mad and vain to spoil them by looking for some other, firmer more lasting life that did not exist.” (p.99)

“But misfortunes do not last forever (this they have in common with joys) but pass away or are at least diminished and become lost in oblivion.” (p. 101)

Ivo Andric, *The Bridge on the Drina*, 1945

### **I. Introduction**

In the “The Tenth Circle of Hell: A Memoir of Life in the Death Camps of Bosnia”, Rezak Hukanovic said, “in a war like this, truth had to be killed first”. In the multi-ethnic tolerance and harmony that prevailed in post W.W.II Yugoslavia, to begin a genocidal war, lies had to be told. One group of Slavic people had to be convinced that another group of their Slavic countrymen was inferior, impure and dangerous. Six hundred years of history had to be manipulated to appear to require an urgent and violent response. The response was an ‘ethnic cleansing’ that turned former friends into bitter enemies, forced farmers away from family to become roving militiamen, and changed the bucolic countryside of Bosnia into a war-zone dotted with concentration camps and mass graves. As a member of an international agency working in

Bosnia in 1997, I struggled to comprehend what had so recently transpired in this green, mountainous land of central Europe. This paper grows out of that effort to understand the origins and circumstances of this war in order to develop ideas about how the work of the international community could be more effective in this post-war period.

In March of 1997 I went to Bosnia to work on the organization of the first post-war local elections. I was seconded by the U.S. State Department to the Organization for Security and Cooperation or the O.S.C.E. My job was to supervise the preparation and implementation of 'free and fair' democratic local elections in three municipalities of Northwestern Bosnia. The organization of these elections by O.S.C.E. were a provision of the Dayton Agreement, the U.S. brokered peace agreement signed into acceptance on 14 December, 1995. The Dayton agreement stipulated that: 'Free and democratic elections be held throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina next year.' and 'requested the O.S.C.E. to supervise the preparation and conduct of these elections.'<sup>1</sup>

These were the first local elections since the war in Bosnia began in April, 1992. Elections were seen by the international community as a significant first step in realizing the long-term peace and reconciliation objectives of the Dayton Agreement. The hope for these elections was to establish a democratically elected, local leadership in post-war Bosnia. Despite the uneasy truce codified by the Dayton agreement, tensions between the three previously warring parties, the Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Croats, were still very high. The Dayton Agreement stated that 'people displaced by the war will have the right to vote in their original place of residence if they so chose.' and that 'all of Bosnia's people will have the right to move freely throughout the country'. This provision falls beneath the umbrella of the pivotal promise

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<sup>1</sup>OSCE Mission Member's Manuel, 7 Feb., 1996

of the peace agreement that 'refugees and displaced people will have the right to return home or receive just compensation.'

The four year war in Bosnia was largely an effort of Serbs and sometimes Croats to force Muslims from lands in which they were living. It successfully 'cleansed' Muslims from large parts of the territory of Bosnia Herzegovina. The Dayton Agreement *theoretically* reversed the results of the war. It stated that everyone could return to their pre-war homes. The 1997 municipal elections were seen as a significant first step in realizing this process. These elections allowed people to vote for their pre-war municipalities. This implied that elected leaders could return to areas from which they were forcibly removed by war and, just months later, hold significant political offices. Despite the promises and aspirations of the Dayton agreement, the affects of the war clearly could not be reversed by the signing of this peace accord. The fear, hatred and desire for revenge created by the war could not be forgotten with the signing of this agreement in Dayton, Ohio.

Some saw these elections as a continuation of the nationalist\* agendas over which the war was fought, but now settled by the far more civil and internationally monitored contest of voting. For the more pessimistically inclined, these elections would legitimize and solidify the influence of war-time leaders and the nationalist agendas that began the war. From an optimistic perspective, these elections would begin to reverse the 'ethnic cleansing' that forced the massive population displacement of almost two million people by having leaders from exiled communities elected into office in their pre-war municipalities. The elections would inevitably do a little of both.

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\*For the purposes of this paper I will use the terms nationality and ethnicity interchangeably to designate generalized and locally understood differences between Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

I was given two weeks notice before my departure date and by the end of March, 1997, I found myself as an Election Officer in Northwestern Bosnia helping to organize the registration and voting of an estimated 80,000 to 120,000 people for the September 13 and 14 municipal elections. My area of responsibility included the municipalities of Sanski Most, Kljuc and Bosanski Petrovac, a mostly agricultural area nestled among green rolling mountains in Northwestern Bosnia. My responsibilities included: the registration and monitoring of political parties, the registration and polling of the local population as well as a significant displaced population temporarily living in the area, voter education, and the formation of local election commissions, the local bodies with whom the O.S.C.E. were to work in organizing and monitoring the election.

I began my work unprepared. Shortly after my arrival in Sanski Most I remember asking staff in my office about the ethnicity of the two major political parties, the SDS (Serb Democratic Party) and the SDA (Muslim Party for Democratic Action). A woman with whom I worked closely and who barely escaped with her life when the military branch of the SDS attacked her town said that if I did not know that I should not be there. I believe she was right. These were the political branches of the two major warring factions, the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims. Amongst Muslims, in the aftermath of a genocidal war against Muslims, an international Election Officer who did not understand these most basic aspects of the politics of the war continued a painful legacy of internationals who bungled in Bosnia. It was essential that I quickly make sense of my work environment if I was to work effectively.

As anyone who has tried to follow Bosnian developments during or after the war would readily admit, the national and international situation defies simple explanations. Bosnia is located in the midst of diverse religious, ethnic, and geo-political interests; with a complex history of Russian and Greek Orthodox alliances to Serbs, German and Austrian Catholic alliances to Croats, and Turkish, Iranian and Islamic connections to the Bosnian Muslims. It has a long,

frequently referred to, and often misused, history of conflict. During W.W.II Bosnia was the fighting ground for Serbian Chetniks, Croatian Ustache, Germany's invading armies and Tito's Yugoslav communists. World War I began in Bosnia with the murder of the Austrian Duke in Sarajevo. Between the 17th and 19th centuries areas of former Yugoslavia formed the shifting borders of the Ottoman empire and the Austro-Hungarian empire. Understanding the experience of the war for local people required some knowledge of the region's history and an awareness of the circumstances of the war. Coming to terms with how various groups in Bosnia viewed the international community was essential to understanding what was said, inferred and unsaid in meetings. Additionally, as a member of the international community organizing the structure through which political leaders were to be chosen in this complex and tense post-war period, it was important that I try to understand and describe to my local Bosnian colleagues the shifting, and sometimes shifty, role and limitations of the international community in this process.

This essay is an effort to create a written map of the Bosnian situation as it related to my work. It is a product of the lessons learned from my work as well as from reading and especially from talking to Bosnians about the war. It starts with a bird's eye view that provides a brief outline of the ancient and recent history that led up to the war. The perspective then narrows, with a synopsis of an informal survey I conducted about the beginnings of the war in the area of Northwestern Bosnia where I was working. Of interest throughout is the role of the international community\* in Bosnia, leading up to, during, and especially after the war. The war ended with the Dayton peace agreement which created an internationally monitored blueprint for the future of Bosnia as a nation. The paper explores some of the conundrums inherent to major provisions of the Dayton agreement and describes how this effected my work on the 1997 municipal

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\* While I recognize the ambiguities of the concept, I use the term international community to mean the response of several nations acting in relative consensus for humanitarian purposes.



elections. In conclusion I speculate on the effort to recreate Bosnia as a unified, multi-ethnic state and develop some specific ideas about how international assistance to this 'unfinished peace'<sup>2</sup> process could be more effective.

### **a) A Brief Historical Context**

This paper begins with a brief historical overview of the situation in Bosnia. The timeline provided is a sketch of significant events that contribute to a long history of ethnic tensions. Many argue that the war in Bosnia and former Yugoslavia was inevitable, using this history of tension and conflict between Serbs, Muslims, Croats and other groups in the area as evidence. My intention in providing a historical context is not to support this thesis. As can be inferred from several places in this paper, the area's history of conflict is more relevant as a tool for nationalist leaders to foster fear and instigate fighting than it is as evidence of an ever-present tension simmering beneath society at a popular level, and preparing to boil over. There was nothing inevitable about this war and if any single most significant cause were to be highlighted it should be the manipulation of this history and the media by a few radical nationalists, most noteworthy being Slobodan Milosovic, President of former Yugoslavia, Radavan Karadavic, war-time leader of the Bosnian Serbs, and Franco Tudjman, President of Croatia, to create a popular belief in the need for war. These three sought to consolidate political power by fanning the dim coals of nationalism into a fire. Through the war they expelled ethnic minorities from large areas of land and hoped to acquire great parts of Bosnia to serve the interests of a 'Greater Serbia' or a larger Croatia.

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<sup>2</sup> *Unfinished Peace*, International Commission on the Balkans

The following time line is a list of major events over the past six hundred years that are significant to Bosnia as a state or to ethnic tensions in the area. They assume some familiarity with the region. For a more detailed and expanded history of the region see Malcom, Noel. *Bosnia: A Short History*, 1994 or West, Rebecca. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 1982. (also references in the bibliography.)

#### **b) Time-line of Significant Events leading up to the Recent Hostilities in Bosnia**

**1389** - The Kingdom of Serbia suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in Kosovo and becomes part of the expanding Ottoman empire.

**1463** - Bosnia loses its independence and becomes a part of the Ottoman empire

**1463 - 1878** Many Bosnians become Muslim under the influence of Islamic conquerors. However four major religions co-exist in a tolerance that is unusual for the period. As the Ottoman Empire's borders recede Muslim Slavs from other provinces seek refuge in Bosnia.

**1878** - As the Ottoman Empire is disintegrating, Bosnia - Herzegovina is given to Austria-Hungary. After 500 years of Ottoman Muslim rule, Serbia is given independence.

**1878 - 1918** Eastern Orthodox Russia promotes Orthodox Serbia in the nationalist dream of a great South Slav state under the leadership of Serbia. Muslim Slavs continue to promote a pluralist, multi-ethnic state.

**1914** - A Serb nationalist assassinates the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, marking the beginning of W.W.I

**1918** - Serbia's ruler was crowned king of the south Slav state of Yugoslavia.

**1918 -1941** Nationalist tensions thrive and the country becomes factionalized. Unresolved social and economic issues help propel the Yugoslav Communist Party.

**1941** - Hitler invades Yugoslavia. The land is parceled out to Germany's allies. A fascist regime in Croatia, the Croatian Ustasha, ethnically cleanse areas of Serbs, Gypsies, Jews and political opponents. Similar ethnic cleansing happens in Serbia, the first Nazi satellite state to declare itself "Judenrein", cleansed of Jews. Chetniks in Serbia begin a campaign of extending Serbia's borders to include Bosnia- Herzegovina and Croatia. Bosnia becomes a killing ground as Croatian Ustasha, Serbian Chetniks, German and Italian occupation troops, and the Communist Partisans fight each other and seek control of the local population.

**1945 - 1980** Tito's Yugoslav communists receive help from the Soviet Union and manage to emerge as the undisputed masters of Yugoslavia. Tito breaks with Stalin and becomes a leader of the international non-aligned movement. Yugoslavia becomes a beneficiary of the Cold War assistance. Tito manages to curb nationalist and religious tensions. The country includes six republics, Bosnia - Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Slovenia.

**1980 - 1990** Tito dies. The unity of Yugoslavia falters. The Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe collapses. East and West Germany unite.

**c) 1986 - 1992 The Disintegration of Yugoslavia**

**1986** - Slobodan Milosevic becomes president of Serbia and embraces an extreme version of nationalism.

**1989, March** - Kosovo, which is 90 % Muslim Albanian, has its autonomy taken away. Local resistance is brutally crushed. This is seen by many as the first step in Milosevic's attempt to realize the idea of 'Greater Serbia'. Other states become quite concerned.

**1991** - Slovenia, the most prosperous and westernized republic, grows frustrated with Milosevic's attempts to seize greater control, and declares independence. The Yugoslav federal army, which was 70 % Serb, is called upon to prevent the succession but fails miserably.

**1991** - Croatia, home to a large Serb population, declares independence. The Yugoslav army begins a full scale offensive and intense fighting ensues, ending in a UN brokered cease-fire with a third of Croatia under Serbian forces. This fighting is characterized by 'ethnic cleansing', and the targeting of civilians and cultural landmarks.

**1992** - Germany's recognition of Croatian and Slovene independence further isolates Yugoslavia's efforts to maintain control and greatly exacerbates the situation. Macedonia's secession is imminent.

**1992, April 5** - With US encouragement Bosnia declares independence. The Yugoslav National Army immediately begins attacking citizens in Sarajevo. An arms embargo is placed on former-Yugoslavia, making it very difficult for the vastly weaker Bosnians to defend themselves against Serb forces. Methods of ethnic cleansing include killing of non-Serb civic, religious and intellectual leaders, the confinement of all males of military age into concentration camps, and the use of rape as a weapon of terror.

**1993** - Croat nationalists begin their own "ethnic cleansing" campaign of Bosnian Muslims in an effort to carve an all Croat homeland in Herzegovina.

**1994** - Eventually Bosnian Croats and Muslims join in an marriage of convenience to fight Serb forces. This shaky alliance is maintained in the Dayton agreement.

This time-line is a very brief synopsis of the history, recent and ancient, that lead to the genocidal war the world recently watched on TV. It demonstrates how far back some of these tensions go and helps to underscore the kind of issues that nationalists used to garner support for their cause. The first step to understanding this war is to clarify who was fighting who in Bosnia. During the first two years of the war in Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats were seeking to cleanse parts of Bosnia of Bosnian Muslims. In 1994, Bosnian Croats shifted sides and joined forces with Bosnian Muslims to fight Bosnian Serbs in a US brokered agreement. Throughout the war Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat forces were mostly controlled and greatly assisted by Serb and Croat governments in their respective states.

## **II. The War at a Popular Level, Neighbor against Neighbor**

Far more mystifying and troubling than the war between Serb, Croat or Muslim forces is how civilians came to believe the lies of nationalist war-mongers and were convinced of the need to take arms against neighbors. Though there were roving groups of para-military Serb nationalists who came from Serbia into Bosnia to fight this war, there were many Bosnian Serbs who were suddenly whipped into a frenzy of genocidal killing, cruel torture and organized rape after years of living harmoniously with Muslims. I have found nothing that adequately explains this. While

in Bosnia I carried out my own informal survey by asking people questions about the beginnings of the war. I wanted to understand how civilians became convinced of the need to take up arms against neighboring civilians, especially in this case of an unusually tolerant multi-ethnic state in which one third of all urban marriages were across ethnicities. I asked people I met how the war began for them and what they understood of its beginnings. Most of the people I spoke to were from Prijedor. Prijedor is one of the largest cities in Bosnia with a population of over one hundred thousand. It was roughly forty percent Bosnian Muslim and forty percent Bosnian Serb before the war. The following is an extraction of many different accounts of the beginning of fighting in Prijedor.

#### **a) A Synthesis of the Local Muslim Perspective on the Beginning of the War in Prijedor**

##### ***1. Pre-War Relations***

When I began asking people about the beginnings of the war I was concerned that my questions might appear voyeuristic or force people to reopen difficult experiences that they were trying to put behind them. I learned that if the war were brought up at an appropriate time and in a sensitive manner, people were very willing to talk at length about its origins. Most Bosnians are struggling to understand the war and despite strong emotions, the opportunity to voice thoughts on how and why it began and took the shape that it took could be a part of this process. I frequently brought people back to visit their pre-war homes. I drove an international vehicle that could safely and easily cross the inter-ethnic border line. My office promised local leaders that we would provide transportation, communication and facilitation assistance to any meeting in which Muslims and Serbs from either side of the inter-ethnic border line sought to meet and discuss constructive issues. In carrying displaced minorities back to their pre-war towns and villages, Bosnians would inevitably bring up issues connected to what was happening early in the war when they were first forced to leave their homes.

Most of the younger urban people I spoke to claimed that there was almost no thought given to the nationality of others as they grew up. This varied slightly but most described nationality, ethnicity or religion as insignificant. Some said that they had heard occasional derogatory remarks about another ethnicity from older family members. They described hearing things like 'Muslims have too many children' or 'Serbs are dirty', but for most of the young these beliefs were considered the idiosyncrasies of an older generation. Most Muslim men I spoke to had dated Serbian girls, and had Serbian best friends and neighbors. Physically Serbs, Croats and Muslims look identical, and so names are the only way people know the historical ethnicity or religion of another. Since religion had been largely repressed during Tito's time and national distinctions were encouraged only in the form of innocuous songs or handicrafts, for the young, and especially urban dwellers, nationalism seemed mostly absent in daily interactions.

Few older people would be as dismissive of these issues as the young. Almost anyone who had lived in a city must have worked closely with and had friends and neighbors who were of other nationalities. Unlike the young who could say they were largely unaware of the differences, older people said that in many cases national differences became inconsequential over time with their friends and neighbors but not forgotten. Older people were much more conscious of issues of religion and nationality, but most said it rarely was discussed before the war.

Rural areas could be quite different. There were certain villages that had a reputation of being openly hostile to particular nationalities before the war. In the area I worked I heard more of Serb villages that were intolerant of Muslims. Muslims could be beat up or molested if they were in these areas after dark. Muslims rarely went to these areas which were generally well off the beaten track. In these areas that were less effected by modernity and the Yugoslav state, history remained more current and intolerance more common.

## ***2. Manipulation by Local Media and The Beginnings of Ethnic Cleansing***

When Bosnia declared independence in April of 1992 there was much uncertainty about how Serbia would react. Nobody believed that things could possibly regress to the warring chaos that had been seen during W.W.II. In the forty-five years since W.W.II, Yugoslavia had been peaceful and prosperous. But shortly after Bosnia's declaration of independence, some sort of nationalist forces took over all the radio stations and media in Prijedor. This group began a belligerent media campaign claiming that the Muslims were planning an attack on the city. Radio stations soon announced that Muslim forces were in fact surrounding the city and preparing for an attack at any moment. Civilians were warned to prepare for this attack by arming themselves and to vigilantly prevent Muslims from gathering. Muslim leaders, intellectuals and celebrities began to disappear or were found dead. Local Muslims families were forced to turn in any weapons they had.

It was not long before all civil institutions broke down. The police stations quickly became centers of Serb nationalist activities. Most Muslims remained hidden in their houses and had no place to turn to when problems arose. The media reported that the people responsible for the Muslim conspiracy were being arrested and detained. Everyone was asked to prepare for the worst. Local Serbs were advised to be proactive in their preparations for a Muslim attack.

Before long most Muslim men of military age were in camps or killed. Those that remained behind were advised to evacuate or fear reprisals. Families were charged large sums of money for the opportunity to board a bus carrying nothing and travel to the border of Croatia or to Muslim parts of Bosnia. Those who remained behind were terrorized until leaving seemed the



only hope of survival. Within a short period of time every Muslim from the area had been forced to leave, imprisoned, or killed.<sup>3</sup>

It remains to be explained why so many Serbs believed this kind of propaganda about former neighbors and friends especially in the absence of any physical evidence of organized revolt. It would be revealing to know how many Serbs did not believe what was being told to them but felt unable to resist the contagion of nationalist fervor or submitted reluctantly. It will probably remain forever unexplainable why many Bosnian Serbs were driven to beat, torture, starve, and rape Muslims during this four year war.

#### **b) Mass Killings and Graves**

The expulsion of Muslims from Prijedor described above may help to explain how the war began in some places, but as the ethnic cleansing progressed an ill-equipped Muslim resistance formed and front lines were drawn. As full-scale war developed, the ethnic cleansing of areas became significantly more violent and brutal. One tactic that remains easily documentable after the war is mass graves. After the take-over of a village, all the remaining survivors of a battle were lined up before a large hole, and hopefully shot, before being buried.

In other cases Muslims were taken to prison camps, starved, tortured, and raped as policy of war directed by Radavan Karadavic, the Bosnian Serb leader, who is a Columbia University trained poet/psychologist turned nationalist war monger. These policies were part of a conscious effort to demoralize the enemy in a fight that was waged on psychological as well as physical fronts. In the area where I worked the discovery and unearthing of mass grave sites was very common and the local emotions that accompanied disinterment were enormous. A mass grave that was

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<sup>3</sup> Hukanovic, *The Tenth Circle of Hell*

being unearthed just up the road from my office was discovered to have a live mine only after two people lost a leg while trying to identify partly decomposed bodies, an incredibly cruel gesture on the part of some departing soldier.

These sites are a kind of living testimony to the horror of the war. Most Muslim families are still missing family members. Sometimes it is only the discovery of the body that will finally put to rest the remote hope that a family member could be living. For many, only a proper burial of the dead will allow the living to rest in peace. Keeping records of the missing, identifying bodies, making records for the war crime tribunal and contacting relatives, required far more coordination and resources than were locally available. In the area where I was living, when a mass grave was being unearthed there was often no witnesses outside of the local population and limited records were kept. One day, when enough time has passed that people have some perspective on this war and historians are trying to create an honest account, the lack of clearly, and impartially verified and documented disinterments will mean that this important history remains contested.

### **c) The Media Penetrates Prison Camps**

The arrival of international news reporters in some of the prison camps in 1993, Omarska outside of Prijedor being the first and one of the most famous, woke up the world to what was happening. Little happened, though, to prevent the genocide for another two years despite international awareness through daily observation. However the media's discovery of these camps did make a localized but significant difference. The most immediate result was that Serb forces closed some of these camps and freed surviving prisoners. Serbs were pressured to hide or clean up the concentration camps and to lessen more extreme forms of torture. For those living in camps this kind of change is enormous and demonstrates the results media attention

combined with public pressure can have. The longer term result of disclosing these prison camps with captives obviously beaten and on the edge of starvation, was that it nudged the painfully slow process of international intervention slightly forward. National governments could no longer claim that this was a civil war as a means to justify inaction. These pictures and accompanying reports made it all too clear that the elimination of a particular ethnic group from a large area of land was the motivation of this war. The resemblance to Hitler's Nazi Germany became undeniable. With international public opinion more convinced than ever that some kind international intervention was necessary Clinton ran for office on a platform of greater US engagement in Bosnia and by the middle of 1995 US military intervention finally brought the warring parties to the negotiating table.

### **III. The End of the War and the Dayton Peace Plan**

#### **a) The Involvement of the International Community**

The war began in the area of Bosnia Herzegovina in April of 1992 and continued through to November of 1995. Much of the world watched this genocide from the comfort of their homes. There is an enormous and necessary history to be told regarding the international efforts, bungles and avoidance of intervening more directly, forcibly, or clearly in this war. The mistakes made in Bosnia should be understood and remembered so as to prevent them from happening again. In this paper though I will only outline a few noteworthy international efforts in Bosnia. It is not my intention in this paper to develop a critique of failed diplomacy during this war. However, as a member of the international community working in Bosnia it was necessary to understand that these events stood out in the mind of Bosnians. This legacy of international bungles and inaction during the war hangs like an albatross over the shoulder of every international working in Bosnia after the war.

### ***1. International Efforts in Bosnia Commonly Viewed as Failures***

- German and then European recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia forced former Yugoslavia to contend with its disintegration rather than encouraging a diplomatic arrangement.<sup>4</sup>
- The US lead an international trade embargo of former Yugoslavia during the war which helped to keep the warring parties hugely mismatched. When the war began Serbs controlled 70 % of the Yugoslav army.
- The UN declared safe havens near active fronts, encouraging civilians to seek shelter from the war in these areas. These safe havens became death camps when Serbs attacked and UN soldiers were not given authorization to fight or were taken hostage. The worst of these is the fall of Srebrenica between July 12 and July 16, 1995 when seven thousand seventy-nine civilians were killed in mass executions and ambushes after promises of UN protection. This is Europe's worst massacre since World War II.<sup>5</sup>
- UN soldiers unable to protect themselves were taken hostage by Serb forces and held the international community at their mercy.
- Many failed peace plans ended up being cease-fires for military rest and regrouping.
- Tremendous amounts of war assistance ended up in the hands of combatants.

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<sup>4</sup>G. C. Thomas, Ragu, "Self-Determination and International Recognition Policy" World Affairs, Summer 1997

<sup>5</sup>Holbrooke, Richard. *To End a War*. p. 68-72

## ***2. International Accomplishments During the War***

Despite the many ways the international efforts could be credited with making the situation worse than it already was this war was clearly a war fought by peoples of former Yugoslavia, and instigated primarily by internal politics. The international community could also be credited with some substantial accomplishments in this terribly destructive affair.

- Billions of dollars provided assistance to the war affected. Great efforts were made to reconnect war separated families.
- Several hundred thousand refugees were at least temporarily resettled in host countries.
- Fear of international reprisal occasionally contained the Serbs from being more aggressive or ruthless.
- The arrival of international reporters to concentration camps changed international public opinion and pressured national governments to respond more aggressively to this war.
- The end of the war was finally hastened by the US bombing of several essential sites of the Bosnian Serb military.
- Muslim / Croat military advances with international assistance forced the Serbs to begin bargaining. In November of 1995 the internationally brokered Dayton agreement effectively ended the war.

## **b) The Dayton Agreement: Clashing Perspectives and Agendas**

### ***1. Background***

Rarely does idealism and reality clash so starkly and yet move on together as in this uneasy but enforced truce. To over-simplify a more complex situation, there are four major perspectives that clash in the future of Bosnia, providing a context for the implementation of the Dayton agreement. Bosnian Serb leaders want the territories that they have taken in Bosnia and would prefer to be left alone. They might try to join the state of greater-Serbia. Bosnian Muslim want their homes or just compensation, justice, and for some, revenge, for what they have suffered at the hands of the Serbs. They would prefer not to be left as a small and isolated Muslim state in the middle of central Europe beside unfriendly neighbors. Bosnian Croat leaders would prefer to take their small part of Bosnia and join prosperous Croatia. The international community would like to see a multi-ethnic, democratic state in which refugees returned from host countries to their prewar homes and Bosnia functioned as a single country.

I include a fifth perspective, one rarely referred to because it is not a unified group and has no particular ideology attached to it. It is your average citizen from all parts of Bosnia who would like to see the cessation of ethnic hostilities, war reconstruction, a secure and stable future, economic prosperity, and reconciliation. This group by birth belongs to one of the three big nationalities but is more concerned with their immediate family and their local community than the 'nation' as a whole. This average citizen is largely pre-occupied with the affairs of daily life and post-war survival but is also easily manipulated by media and politicians. This group is fearful that their lives will be interrupted again by forces from other national groups who continue to be presented to them as belligerent neighbors preparing for battle. The media and politicians throughout Bosnia continue to promote this fear by building upon the interests of a particular national group while denigrating other groups.

This took several different forms. In the area I was working the local Muslim radio station and newspaper often recounted war atrocities in great detail with claims like, “We will never forget.” or “We will have revenge.”<sup>6</sup> Other stories often told of events that supposedly happened to Muslims who were in nearby Serb areas. Often these were fabricated and almost always exaggerated or one-sided. I knew of very similar claims made in Serb newspapers.

Many individuals find themselves in an uneasy tension between the agenda and identity of their national group and their own hopes for the future. One result of this war is that most citizens feel a greatly intensified identification with their own ethnicity and religion. Another result of the war is that the desire for a more peaceful and secure future holds more power and meaning than it held before the war. The Dayton agreement, and its contradictions, resonates with the tensions within many individuals.

## **2. The Agreement**

The Dayton Agreement is an agreement the Serbs, Croats and Muslims could sign and the international community could endorse. This peculiar mix of interests creates a blueprint for Bosnia’s future riddled with inherent contradictions.<sup>7</sup> The peace plan inextricably involves the international community in the national and domestic issues of this re-formed country. It both accepts many of the results of the war at the same time that it is a formula for reversing the separation of people, land and ethnicity created by the war. It establishes Bosnia Herzegovina as a single, multi-ethnic state divided into two ethnically divided entities. One of the two territories is called the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with 51 % of the land and inhabited almost

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<sup>6</sup> Articles in the *Prijedor Mirror*, Summer 1997

<sup>7</sup>*Unfinished Peace*, p. xix

entirely by Bosnian Muslims and Croats, the other is the Republic of Serpska with 49 % of the land and inhabited by Bosnian Serbs. The agreement seems to legalize the ethnic division created by the war. It creates two parallel, formerly warring, governments within a single government. It forces Croats and Muslims together in the Federation despite their recent history of war and distrust. The agreement called for tremendous international involvement in the political processes of the new country. The following is a summary of the agreement.

### ***3. Summary of the Dayton Peace Agreement<sup>8</sup>***

- The agreement settles the territorial issues over which the war was fought.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina continues as a single state, but divides into two administrative entities. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina will administer 51% of the country, the Republic of Serpska will administer 49% of the country.
- There will be freedom to travel anywhere throughout the country.
- Refugees and displaced people will have the right to return home or obtain just compensation for lost land and housing.
- Free and democratic elections will be held, organized by an international organization. People displaced by the war will have the right to vote in their pre-war place of residence.

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<sup>8</sup> *OSCE Mission Member's Manual. 7. Summary of the Peace Agreement*



- The militaries must withdraw forces behind an agreed upon cease fire line. The withdrawal and activities of local military forces will be monitored by NATO forces called SFOR under a US general. SFOR will implement and monitor the peace agreement and defend it vigorously under all circumstances.
- The Office of the High Representative will be created to implement and coordinate civilians aspects of the peace agreement.
- International donors will implement a program to help reconstruct Bosnia.
- Sanctions will be lifted but reinstated if necessary to encourage compliance.
- Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina commit to fully cooperate with the international investigation and prosecution of war crimes. Indicted criminals will not be allowed to hold office.
- A UN International Police Task Force will train and advise enforcement personnel, and monitor law enforcement activities, facilities, and proceedings.

The Dayton agreement distributed land between the two entities and three ethnicities within this single country. It created the constitutional and civil structure for governing this divided country. It also created mechanisms for implementing an uneasy truce. The agreement called for an international military, police force, court system, election agency, human rights organization and coordinating body to oversee and assist the newly formed country in a variety of largely domestic issues. The agreement additionally promised development and war-reconstruction assistance. Almost all international agencies in Bosnia play some part in the

larger process of realizing the Dayton agreement. My work with O.S.C.E. in Bosnia was part of the organization's mission to oversee elections.

#### **IV. The Elections**

##### **a) General Background**

Internationals in Bosnia liked to say this was the most complicated election ever. Half the population of the country was displaced, a few hundred thousand lived as refugees in countries throughout the world. Many people had lost all forms of valid identification as a result of the war. A highly significant and difficult provision of the Dayton Agreement allowed citizens the choice of voting where they lived before the war or where they have lived since the war ended. As a result of this provision a major issue of the election was which national parties would be elected into office in areas from which all their nationals had been forced to vacate during the war. This was seen as a major first step in the process of reversing the ethnic separation that was a result of the war. But this same issue, who would live where, was the issue over which the war was fought.

##### ***1. O.S.C.E. - Organization for Security and Cooperation***

I was seconded to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or O.S.C.E.. O.S.C.E. came out of talks in the 1970s between the United States and the Soviet Union and other nuclear powers over nuclear weaponry. It was designed to establish programs of confidence-building and mutual vulnerability between nations with nuclear weaponry as a way of preventing a surprise attack. The O.S.C.E. has been labeled a post-modern organization. The more traditional concept of the nation-state is weakened as the organization seeks to

institutionalize a highly developed system for mutual interference in member nations domestic affairs when security issues are at stake. The forty-three member states agree to manage their armed forces and defense policies according to O.S.C.E. principles. It is an institutionalized forum for meddling in what has been traditionally considered the domestic affairs of nations .<sup>9</sup>

## ***2. Local Area Background: the Municipalities of Sanski Most, Kljuc and Bosanski Petrovac***

I was sent to Sanski Most, the largest of the three municipalities in which I was to work. National elections had been organized by the O.S.C.E. a year earlier so there was already an infrastructure and office set up by the organization when I arrived. I was to work with Local Election Commissions in each municipality in organizing this election. Sanski Most had almost equal Muslim and Serb populations before the war. During the war it was taken by the Serbs and cleansed of all Muslims. Near the end of the war, shortly before the signing of the Dayton agreement, it was taken back by Muslim and Croat forces, and almost all the Serb civilians left as the Serb military retreated. Since the peace agreement in 1995 it had been resettled by around sixty thousand people, about half were Bosnian Muslims from the area, slightly less than half were displaced Muslims from nearby areas in the Republic of Serpska. There is also a small population of Bosnian Croats. The three municipalities I worked in were adjacent to Republic of Serpska and the boundary line which separates the two entities, known as the Inter-ethnic Border Line, or the IEBL. Due to this area's proximity to areas of the Serb Republic from which many Muslims are in forced exile, this area was home to the largest number of displaced communities in Bosnia.

My work also involved the two smaller municipalities of Kljuc and Bosanski Petrovac, with estimated populations of eighteen thousand and eight thousand respectively. Kljuc was located

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<sup>9</sup>Cooper, Robert. *The Post-Modern State and the World Order*. p. 22-26

adjacent to the IEBL on the main road that connected Western Bosnia to the rest of the country. Before the war Bosanski Petrovac was a mostly Serb town, but at the time of this election, it was almost entirely inhabited by displaced Muslims. This population shift made the election in Bosanski Petrovac of particular interest. The displaced Muslims that lived in the municipality were likely to vote for their pre-war municipalities. It was very possible that even a small Serb vote could elect Serbs into all the major municipal offices of this Muslim town.

#### **b) Organizing the Election**

In an election in which fifty percent of the electorate nationwide was displaced by war, O.S.C.E. was going to have to decide who could legitimately vote where. It was obvious to anyone interested which areas of the country were going to be politically contested based on pre-war populations. The general thrust of the election was that the major Serb parties were going to consolidate power in the areas that they had taken during the war, whereas the main Muslim party was trying to reclaim influence over areas from which they had been forced. The national elections a year earlier showed some political parties would make a great effort to manipulate election results. O.S.C.E. was forced to devise a criteria by which registering voters could establish citizenship and residency before the war in 1991 or residency in 1995 when the war ended. Most municipalities were missing record books and many people had little to verify location of residency six years earlier. O.S.C.E. had to determine which government agencies would be allowed to issue certificates of citizenship and what combination of documents would be acceptable.

A six week registration period was organized three months before this election. Anyone interested in voting would have to register at this time and be able to verify their right to vote in their pre-war or post-war residence. The legitimacy of voters would be determined in this period and questionable registrations could, in theory, be researched. Having this aspect of the election

determined far ahead of the election made it easier to detect questionable trends in voter registration.

The O.S.C.E. advertised itself as organizing ‘free and fair democratic elections’. However the unusual circumstances of the election forced the organization to compromise both the freedom and the fairness of the election registration. ‘Fair’ included preventing people from manipulating the vote by voting in places that they falsely claimed to have settled in since the end of the war or did not live in before the war. ‘Free’ included allowing all eligible citizens to vote even if documentation was difficult and legitimacy was uncertain. As cases of voter registration abuse were detected, an ever-expanding set of criteria and steps to adjudicate questionable residency claims were created. These restrictions disenfranchised some citizens because they did not have the required documentation, while some illegitimate voters were probably allowed to register because criteria could not become too restrictive. Considering the country had been at war just one and a half years earlier about issues that were being worked out in this election, these compromises were unfortunate but necessary.

### **C) Protecting Bosnians from O.S.C.E.**

Although admittedly the O.S.C.E. was facing enormous obstacles in organizing an election at this fragile moment in Bosnia’s peace process, I found the organization sorely lacking in organizational foresight and political integrity. O.S.C.E. was often unresponsive to the field, weak in the face of political pressure, and arbitrary about implementing election directives. I frequently knew of situations when the organization was warned of problems an initiative was going to create and yet nothing would be done until the problem had grown unmanageable. This became most acute during the registration process when myself and several others warned the organization that the wording on the registration form which was to be filled out by every voter in the country was unclear and probably wrong. The question asked the registrant if they

intended to vote 'in' their 1991 municipality or 'in' their 1997 municipality. The word should have been 'for', because many voters would vote 'in' their 1997 municipality 'for' their 1991 municipality by absentee ballot. The O.S.C.E. waited until after the registration process and after receiving thousands of wrongly registered voters before trying to correct this mistake despite warnings early in the process. I suspect the problem was never adequately fixed. Oversights of this sort were fairly typical and tremendous amounts of energy were expended fixing problems that should have been avoided.

From the field it usually appeared that the O.S.C.E. Headquarters in Sarajevo were unaware of the activities of its various branches. Field Offices would receive orders from one part of the organization that conflicted with directives from other parts of the organization. This became particularly problematic when we received allocation of money for registration and polling station staff, only to have it over-ridden a few days later.

One of the most frustrating moments of my work came just a day or two after the election. The organization removed a requirement for 'proportional representation' in municipal assemblies from the *Election Rules and Regulations*<sup>\*</sup>, a decision that would obviously weaken Muslim parties. Without 'proportional representation' it would be easier for newly formed municipal assemblies to systematically block unwanted minority groups from holding as many seats as they had received in proportion to the vote. Striking 'proportional representation' meant a party could receive 40 % of the vote but potentially receive a far smaller percentage of the municipal seats if a coalition against the party were formed. This was apparently done under pressure from Croat and Serb parties that were concerned about the strength of Muslim parties in many 'ethnically cleansed' municipalities. This was akin to changing the ante in a poker game after the hand had been played. In another example the organization had not managed to compile the

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<sup>\*</sup>Rules created by OSCE to govern these elections.

candidate lists until just before the election. Many candidates who had been doing campaign preparations were inexplicably left off the list. I succeeded in my area after a great conflict with the OSCE Headquarters office to have missing candidates added by hand at the last minute to the candidate list but I suspect in many places candidates suddenly found themselves unable to run. I sometimes felt like part of my job was to protect people in my area of responsibility from my organization.

## **V. The Impracticality of Return**

### **a) Partition or Return?**

The central issue to international efforts in Bosnia's future, after preventing the resumption of war, is whether to accept partition of the country or to struggle to reverse it. The division of the country into two entities is a kind of partition that may become more or less entrenched over time. The return of displaced ethnic minorities to both sides of IEHL would reverse this separation but as of Spring of 1998 very few people had returned.

On the surface of things the idea of people returning back across the ethnic divide to lands from which they have so recently been brutally 'ethnically cleansed' appears 'highly problematic'. This was a war in which two to three hundred thousand, mostly Muslim civilians, were killed. A nationalist war in which rape was a policy demanded by commanding officers to demoralize the enemy. A time of wide spread torture and starvation in prison camps. A place where the beating of prisoners as drunken sport was common and neighbors took arms against neighbors. To many Bosnians, international aid workers come to Bosnia from the complacent suburbs of developed West European or North American cities seeking good salaries. The local perception is that the staff of international agencies are often indifferent and usually unaware of the circumstances of

the war. In the aftermath of this war, when international agencies create programs suggesting displaced people return to their pre-war homes and reconcile their national differences or have a just exchange of property, and justify these programs as provisions of the Dayton agreement, Bosnians perceive the naivete and the lack of local awareness for which international aid and development workers have become infamous. Four years of war have been fought over the issue of who would live where and yet the Dayton agreement envisions a return to life as it was before the war. This seems to deny the terrible lasting reality of the war for so many people. This suggests the sudden end of tremendous distrust, fear, hatred, and an intense desire for revenge. This would involve a willingness to trust large political and administrative institutions, institutions which in the view of most have recently failed terribly.

So, while acknowledging enormous obstacles, why does return to a harmonious multi-ethnic state appear possible? This question is central to all the long-term international projects in Bosnia. I will address this question from a several directions. I will begin in a broadly philosophic vein and then develop ideas for a more systematic approach to the process of implementing the Dayton agreement.

The war in Bosnia is testimony to the malleability of the human spirit. The great mystery of the war is how Yugoslav citizens quickly changed from relatively peaceful neighbors to brutal warring forces. The great tragedy of the war is the plight of unsuspecting Central European Muslims turned overnight into desperate victims struggling with existence against genocidal forces. The outbreak of a war from the recent peace of pastoral Yugoslavia exemplifies the extremes to which people can adapt. It demonstrates how a group of people can be manipulated into believing a lie about the supposed threat of an ethnicity or religion. It exemplifies the abuses of history for political purposes. Radical adaptation and social transformation need not happen only in the direction of violence and destruction. Great shifts in national politics and human consciousness flow in both directions, not just those built upon lies or manipulation. The



idea of the European Union after W.W. I and W.W. II, and the end of the Cold War demonstrate that hostile relations can subside. With the passing of time effort must be made to resuscitate the ethnic relations that existed just prior to this war. In general terms the long term goals of the international community in Bosnia include the less tangible effort to undo the lies that began the war while creating programs that encourage ethnic reconciliation combined with the more tangible goals of mediating and containing political tensions and reconstructing the economic and material infrastructure of the country.

Though the history of ethnic conflict in Balkan history is undeniable, post W.W.II Yugoslavia and Bosnia was an example of unusual ethnic tolerance. One third of all urban marriages was across ethnicities. Most of the young people I spoke to developed friendships with their countrymen regardless of ethnicity or religion. Though older and more traditional people may have exchanged the 'counterfeit coin' of 'provincial courtesy' across ethnicities while harboring distrust, by most indications this distrust was fading. Based on my conversations with Bosnians, before the war ethnicity had become mostly insignificant in daily life. And then a few nationalist leaders fanned the slumbering embers of nationalism back into a flaming fire. If the ugly flame had not been stoked in all likelihood it would have smoldered quietly until forgotten.

At more tangible levels, during my time in Bosnia I saw many instances of hope for the future of ethnic relations. I helped set up meetings between Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Serb politicians, and watched people in these meetings return to levels of acceptance that they themselves had not imagined possible just before the meeting. I carried Muslims and Serbs back and forth across the I.E.B.L. to areas that they lived before the war and watched them greet as wary friends, wishing this war had not created the gulf between them. Large groups of people were organized in communities around the country with the intention to return. During the war and increasing today, people are anxious to resume business ties across the two entities. Everyday on the I.E.B.L. there are groups of people from both sides of the country meeting for

picnics and drinking plum brandy together. The war forced people to lose a basic belief in the humanity of the 'other'. The question the international community has to ask itself as an agent intervening forcibly in Bosnian affairs is what can it do to foster ethnic and religious tolerance and reconciliation. There are four general forms international intervention in post-war Bosnia can take.

## **b) Four Generalized Forms of International Intervention or Assistance**

### ***1. Removal***

The most aggressive form is *removing or sidelining* the forces that promote ethnic animosity or fear. This began when American forces bombed Bosnian Serb forces. The arrest of politically active war criminals, most noteworthy being Radavan Karadvic, is another example. Curbing media that thrives on ethnic divisiveness is another example.

### ***2) Arbitration and Mediation***

A second direction of international intervention is *arbitrating and mediating* issues that are likely to be divisive along ethnic lines. A good example of this is the War Crimes Tribunal. If war criminals are going to be tried, an international body like the War Crimes Tribunal is required to conduct these investigations. It is unreasonable to expect Bosnians to try war criminals themselves because of the tensions this would create. An example of where international arbitration is required is settlement of land claim disputes. Neither Bosnian Croats, Serbs or Muslims are likely to trust one another in the settlement of monetary compensation for land lost during the war and an outside party is required. The international monitoring of the elections helped both sides to accept an election that would not have been accepted if locally organized. The return of displaced people will continue to require international arbitration.

### ***3. Reconstruction and Development***

A third direction is *war reconstruction and development*. The sooner the economy and social services of Bosnia are functioning with relative stability, the more daily life is likely to return to normal. If Bosnians of each ethnicity feel economically secure then they are less likely to blame others for their misfortunes and likely to become less fearful of the future. The sooner school children are back in school and social services are returned, the more Bosnians will feel their lives are returning to normal.

### ***4. Direct Work on Ethnic Reconciliation***

A forth form is direct work on issues of *ethnic reconciliation*. During my work I helped organize both public and private meetings between Serbs and Muslims. These meetings were explicitly not a context for discussing national history or the war. They were focussed on administrative aspects of the election that left little room for quibbling over ethnic issues. When the meetings were seen to be progressing in a civil and productive manner, the international mediators stepped back and allowed discussion to follow its own dynamic. I participated in several meetings of this kind and watched local political leaders return to levels of acceptance that they themselves had not imagined possible before the meeting. These meetings forced participants to accept the humanity of the 'other' and to confront the lie that fed this war often in ways that had not happened since the war began. With time Bosnian mediation teams could be trained for this purpose. Successful meetings could be highly publicized and aired on TV or the radio.

Another form this could take is the promotion of cross IEBl business. I knew of people interested in reconnecting coal and iron mines in the Republic of Serpska with iron factories in the Federation. International financial and organizational assistance could have moved these

forward. The international community could promote reconciliation by providing great financial assistance to communities promoting return, creating international public transportation to cross the I.E.B.L., and promoting examples of ethnic reconciliation through the media. Ultimately Bosnians will determine the fate of Bosnia. People must chose to vote for their pre-war municipalities. Individuals must risk return to their pre-war homes. Communities must accept the return of ethnic minorities. The international community could have a substantial, positive influence on this process if committed, innovative, flexible and well-organized.

### **C) Nine Suggestions**

In conclusion I will briefly develop nine specific suggestions based on the ideas mentioned above. These are tangible ways that the international community could intervene more effectively in Bosnia.

1. The Dayton agreement has created several international agencies that assist and monitor potentially troublesome Bosnia institutions. These include the War Crimes Tribunal, trying suspected war criminals, SFOR, the NATO Stabilization Forces, IPTF, the UN lead International Police Task Force, supervising and training local police, OSCE, supervising elections, monitoring human rights and facilitating arms control and the OHR, or the Office of the High Representative, facilitating civilian aspects of the peace agreement. The Dayton Agreement also provides for a comprehensive program of reconstruction assistance.

The involvement of these organizations are central to the Dayton agreement. They represent an unprecedented involvement in the domestic affairs of a nation and should provide tremendous lessons for future international intervention in post conflict situations.

A tremendous oversight was not establishing an apparatus for monitoring the local media. An agency needs to be formally tasked with overseeing, monitoring, and promoting high standards of media conduct. While the Provisional Election Commission has appointed a Media Expert Commission<sup>10</sup> it has been mostly ineffective and its mandate is weak. Manipulation of the media was a major factor in beginning this war. When I left in 1997 it was very obvious that most of the media was under the direct control of various political forces and sought to rally political support through the continuation of fear and nationalist propaganda.

An international news monitoring body could assist and monitor media in a variety of ways. It should be given the power to ban media that continues to actively incite fear and hatred, aggressively serve the purposes of a particular political regime, or demonstrates an unwillingness to broadcast impartial information. Short of banning media, the agency could limit inflammatory news stories, it could verify reporting and it could financially support the development of new and independent media. The agency would create and promote news events that were built upon peace efforts and examples of reconciliation. I was certain these kinds of stories were often available but were rarely reported. As long as most of the media continues to foster ethnic distrust and fear the entire peace process is in jeopardy.

2. International financial assistance needs to be more directly linked to communities, areas and local organizations that are successfully implementing the Dayton agreement. Communities that are assisting the return of ethnic minorities should be given a great priority when international assistance and projects are being decided upon. UNHCR was working on this when I left and hopefully was able to coordinate other agencies to complement their effort.

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<sup>10</sup>*Unfinished Peace*, p.92-93

3. Business ventures that involve partners on both sides of the IEBL should be promoted. The split of the country into two parts is very recent and in no way reflects any historic or geographic division of the country. I personally knew people who were interested in reconnecting coal mines on the Serb side of the country to iron factories in Muslim areas. Cross I.E.B.L. business ventures have a great potential to create locally initiated mutual inter-dependence. Some businesses that have been separated by the war require resources that are locally available only on the other side of the I.E.B.L.. In other cases large communist-era factories need to tap the market for local products that exists on both sides of the I.B.E.L. I knew businessmen and technical experts that were willing and anxious to do cross entity business but were obstructed by local governments. Communication and travel across the I.E.B.L. was still difficult. International organizations could play a substantial role in communication, transportation and facilitation of joint business ventures. Financial resources could be made available to cross I.B.E.L. business projects.

4. A mosque should be built in the city of Banjo Luka. This idea came from several Muslim leaders from this city that are currently living in Sanski Most. Banja Luka is the largest city in the Republic of Serpska. It had a large Muslim population before the war and is more cosmopolitan and progressive than much of the country. With the shift of the Republic of Serpska government from the more radical base in Pale to Banja Luka, the city has taken on an increased significance. Rebuilding a mosque in this city would be of significant symbolic value. It would demonstrate the willingness of Muslims to return to the city. It would serve as a litmus to determine the reaction of Serb nationalists without necessarily endangering people. It might require Bosnian Serb police protection and would thus test their ability and intention. This could possibly be done in conjunction with the construction of an Orthodox church in Sarajevo and a Roman Catholic church in a city of Bosnian Croat choice.

5. The greatest obstacle to the country's future is the return of displaced people. This will determine whether the country ultimately remains divided by ethnicity or begins the process of return. The resolution of this issue may determine whether the country returns to war or to peaceful co-existence. There are large organized groups on both sides of the IEHL who want to return to their pre-war homes. The most obvious way for people to return is for groups on both sides of the IEHL to return at the same time. However the war has left many houses destroyed, and the Bosnian Diaspora has forced people from different parts of the country to live in houses left vacant during the war. The return of one family would often involve the shift of several families. When some one attempts to return but their pre-war home is occupied, where do the inhabitants move? Where do those who are living in the houses of displaced people move if they themselves are not interested in return to their pre-war homes? There are people now all over the world and particularly in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia who could be effected by efforts of the war displaced to return home. For those not interested in return how is just compensation for property destroyed by the war to be worked out? The first several returns are being carefully watched by those interested in return. The return of some could have a domino effect with many people from all parts of the country involved. I believe the Dayton agreement needs to be rethought in light of these issues and formal internationally monitored meetings be held in which the more detailed policies for return and property exchange is formalized.

6. Education will slowly become a forum for working out the long term issues of the war. Over time competing versions of history will struggle for acceptance. At this time though versions of the war are still so disparate that it is too soon for the war to be addressed formally in schools. As Rob Fuderich, UNESCO Education Officer for Bosnia and Central Europe, said, at this point education is still best seen as serving the transition into peace by establishing a routine and feeling of normalcy about life. Schools should endeavor to address the specific, material needs of the country in reconstruction from war. Those with vision could attempt to develop programs that address issues relevant to the war without directly confronting the history of the

war itself. With the passing of time a common understanding of the war will be reached and discussed in schools.

7. In theory and as a provision of Dayton, people can travel anywhere in the two entities of the country. In reality many areas are thought of as inaccessible for fear of what might happen to minorities in these areas. UNHCR has set up two bus lines for people wishing to travel across the IEHL to particular cities. They have been very useful for people who wish to cross for a day and feel unsafe using their own car. This should be built upon.

8. The passing of time should not be seen as failure, especially this time still close to the war. Time eases pain. The pain of the war is tremendous.

9. During my work in 1997 I arranged some of the first local meetings between Serbs and Muslims since the beginning of the war. Since Muslims and Serbs were running for office in the same towns, we held these meetings under the pretext of discussing technical election issues. In reality though we thought of these pre-election meetings as preparation for implementing the election results which would involve elected Serbs and Muslims working together. When local Serb and Muslim politicians gathered in a room at first the atmosphere was tense and the meeting usually began with an accusatory demeanor. Often these men were pre-war colleagues and sometimes friends, now they showed great discomfort simply being in the presence of the 'other'. They would refuse to eat or drink at the same table with one another. But once the meeting was underway and an issue was being discussed, this bravado would slip away. It was as if the humanity of the 'other' would come back to them. From afar, through news stories and war stories, they could hate, but when confronted with one another in the same room discussing an issue that was of mutual importance, the discussion soon slipped into a discussion that might be held with a fellow Serb or Muslim.



A far greater effort should be made to bring Serbs, Muslims and Croats together to discuss almost anything. The issues of the war should be avoided until both sides become comfortable with these kinds of meetings. In the beginning the pretext of the meetings should be as neutral as possible and facilitated by internationals. Local Bosnians could be trained by accomplished facilitators in the early stages of this process. The decisions of these meetings that are reconciliatory in nature should be implemented as quickly as possible. This should be begun at the level of local government officials and brought further into local communities with time, eventually involving social service providers, teachers, professional technicians and farmers. The division of the country is recent enough that in most cases these groups have concerns in common. Though real issues that are of common concern to both sides would have to be identified and ostensibly worked upon, Bosnians would understand implicitly that the issue being worked out would be the nature of their relations together. Your average citizen, more pre-occupied with daily life than national identity, would usually welcome this opportunity. As Hukanovic says this war required a lie to begin. These meetings could allow members to confront the lie and walk away with the truth of one another's humanity.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Over the past few years Western politicians have frequently characterized the war in Bosnia and more recently in Kosovo as the inevitable continuation of ancient hatreds amongst war-like people. This interpretation downplays the role of nationalist leaders in creating these wars. It places the onus of responsibility evenly on all sides of the confrontation and suggests these wars are popularly supported. This perspective serves the purpose of relieving national governments from the need to intervene, claiming the war was the unavoidable outcome of people with a natural tendency to fight rather than an ethnic genocide organized by a handful of leaders. It inadvertently supports the claims of the nationalist leaders themselves who justify this war based on historical necessity. However if the war in Bosnia was created by the manipulation and lies

of current nationalist leaders during a period of relative multi-ethnic peace, the perspective I have developed in several places in this paper, then assisting today's peace process looks quite different. The Dayton agreement struggles much more substantially with the problems created by the war in 1992 rather than with seething hatreds that are centuries old. The real forces behind the war are living leaders. The people of Bosnia are not significantly more inclined to war than other cultures. The hope for peace is more realistic than is generally believed. While I believe neither of these two perspectives can be seen in isolation as complete explanations, the latter comes much closer to describing the situation in Bosnia than the former.

During my time in Bosnia I saw many indications of hope about the peace process. Yet I found many people involved in implementing the Dayton agreement that remained excessively pessimistic and fatalistic about continued peace and this hindered implementation of the Dayton Agreement. Based on my work experiences and recent readings I have attempted to develop a more balanced perspective. I have sought to include fair description of the obstacles to peace while pointing to the reasons for hope. Very simply stated I am making a case for a cautious optimism. From this perspective I have developed a few specific ideas about how the work of the international community could be more effective. Largely as a result of the forceful intervention of the international community the situation in Bosnia has improved dramatically since Dayton was first signed into effect in 1995. My hope is that an informed and committed international effort will continue to successfully serve the process of ethnic reconciliation and war reconstruction in Bosnia.

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